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CURRENT OPINION

Movement toward Church Union in Canada

Three significant expressions of Christian unity in Canada are described by D. J. Fraser in the July number of the *Harvard Theological Review*. The first is the experiment in co-operation of the Congregational, Diocesan (Anglican), Presbyterian, and Methodist Theological Colleges of the city of Montreal. These four colleges, which are affiliated with McGill University, began in 1912 to conduct joint classes, in order to avoid the waste of overlapping. Sixteen professors and two hundred students are involved in the plan, and a trial of three years has proved its success, in the opinion of those most intimately concerned. Each college retains its individuality, appointing its own professors and conferring its own degrees, and is still responsible to the church which it represents. The scheme has received the enthusiastic financial support of the laity of all the churches.

The Church Unity League was organized in 1913 within the Anglican church, "to promote by all constitutional means the cause of Christian unity," and "to set forth by meetings, sermons, and literature the grounds upon which our divisions rest, and to discover the lines of demarkation between those things that are always and everywhere essential and those that are expedient." This league was the outcome of an appeal issued a little earlier by a few leading Anglican clergymen, who "felt the necessity of recognizing in some definite way the manifest Christian experience of the Reformed non-Episcopal churches." Two suggestions were made: (1) the admission of ministers of other churches, under certain restrictions, to the pulpits of the Church of England; (2) permission to members of other communions on occasion to communicate in the Church of England. The appeal was approved and

signed by three hundred clergymen and a thousand laymen, but was answered by a united protest from the ten bishops of Eastern Canada. In spite of this, however, the permanent organization was effected as described above.

But the proposed organic union of the Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian communions of Canada is perhaps the most significant expression of the spirit of unity. The beginnings of the movement date back to 1902, when the Methodist General Conference, meeting in Winnipeg, appointed a Committee on Union to meet similar committees of the other two churches. In 1908 a basis of union was agreed upon by the joint committee under the heads of doctrine, polity, ministry, administration, and law. In 1909 the membership of the three churches voted on the proposed basis. Of the votes cast, 69 per cent of the Presbyterians, 71 per cent of the Congregationalists, and 87 per cent of the Methodists favored the union. The two latter bodies declared their willingness to go forward immediately to the consummation of the plan, but the Presbyterian General Assembly did not feel justified in such action on account of the considerable minority opposed. Negotiations are still continuing, however, and the leaders of the movement are hopeful that success will crown their efforts in the near future.

The Dynamic of the Religious Motive in Rural Redirection

"All permanent success in rural redirection depends on the implanting of the dynamic of the religious motive in the lives of the future leaders of rural life," writes Albert E. Roberts in *Rural Manhood* for June, 1915. Accordingly he urges that a campaign of aggressive personal evangelism for church accession should be included in the program of

each county Y.M.C.A. organization. He points out the danger of neglecting evangelism and Bible-study for the social, physical, and educational activities of the Association. It is true that the latter work is of great importance and may properly be called "religious work," but after all there are many other organizations engaged in these activities and the Association should place special stress on the religious aspect of its work. Herein lies its unique opportunity. Some communities are showing good results in this direction, one county alone last year reporting 200 conversions and 116 accessions to the church. But on the other hand, while the number of members in counties shows an increase of 140 per cent in the past five years, the total religious meetings for men increased but 21 per cent. In view of the increasing interest that is being taken in rural welfare in many directions, the Y.M.C.A. should engage in an earnest effort among the men and boys of rural communities, and, by the use of scientific methods and principles, under the direction of county secretaries of the highest type of efficiency, should seek to win them for Christ. In this way it will help to assure Christian leadership for the new era that seems to be dawning in connection with the great awakening of rural life.

A Minister and the Social Conscience

"It is not enough to pluck a few brands out of the burning even when you can do it; the world wants a religion that will put out the fire." Thus speaks Rev. T. Rhondda Williams, of Brighton, England, in an interview reported by Denis Crane in the July number of the *Homiletic Review*. Mr. Williams was one of the first great preachers who dared to risk the ostracism of his confrères by coming out boldly for a gospel of social regeneration as well as of individual salvation. He maintains that the change in the social and economic conditions of life has changed the moral task that religion has to accom-

plish—that task always being the adjustment of man to his world in the interests of righteousness. The progressive Christian will not be fettered by the outlook of the church in any particular age. He will consider what the spirit of Christianity demands in the solution of concrete problems of the present day. The New Testament may be retained as a source of inspiration without being made a clog on the ideals of progress. Anything that promotes the higher unfolding of human life is a legitimate pulpit theme for the preacher. "Life is not divided into compartments. You cannot tell me that my business is to help people to be good and tell me at the same time that it is not my province to notice their conditions. It is in their conditions that they have to be good." The minister must know the facts about men's industrial relations as well as about their home relations, and he should see that his people know them too. It is his business to create in them a strong social conscience and to fortify their will to abolish evil. He admits that this would involve a change in the training of ministers. Much of the theological curriculum could be dispensed with and more time given to psychology, the social sciences, literature, and ethics. If the church is to be the living servant of living men, the minister's training should surely include a careful study of those relations in which the men with whom the minister will have to deal live every day.

Recent Thought on the Atonement

"Sin is a thing of such guilt and weakness that in logic there is no remedy. Purely rational thought can only convince us of inescapable destruction. So our knowledge of reconciliation with God in Jesus' death must have been effected by something transcendent and supernatural." Thus writes H. R. Mackintosh in the *Review and Expositor* for July, in an article dealing with recent views of the atonement. He says that there is a vast body of modern opinion to which it

would be unjust to deny the name "religious," which appears to have no place at all for saving interposition on Christ's part. It rests satisfied with a purely historical account of the causes which produced the event of Calvary. Among those holding more positive views, he notes a gradual breaking down of the old walls of partition between theories of the atonement. For example, few theologians maintain today that God had need to be appeased, and that appeasement was the result of the sacrifice of Christ. They agree that the love of the Father is the fount of all redemption. Propitiation is thus a word likely to be misleading. Again, the old distinction between forensic and moral theories is being less insisted on. It is seen that neither is entirely satisfactory but that each has some element of the truth. In any case there seems to be a pretty general agreement between them that in atonement the doer is God, even if they differ as to what was done. There is agreement too as to "the cost of forgiveness to God." God could not save without loving and he could not love without suffering. There is another theory, however, put forth first by Dr. McLeod Campbell in a treatise on *The Nature of the Atonement*, and later developed by Canon Moberly in his *Atonement and Personality* (1901), which does not command such general agreement. According to this theory, the atonement of Christ consists in his *vicarious penitence*. Our Lord made in death a perfect response to the divine wrath against sin, and that response has all the elements of a perfect repentance in humanity for all the sins of man. The writer thinks that vicarious penitence is a self-contradictory idea, inasmuch as it could not include a personal consciousness of sin. Furthermore, he thinks it is not taught in the New Testament. Nevertheless this theory has a value in emphasizing the idea of Christ's self-identification with the sinful. Finally, two principles should guide us in all our discussions of the atonement. They

must be conducted within the bounds of Christian experience, and we must not think that they can ever be exhaustive or complete. "There is in the atonement something infinite, something as great and deep and high as God."

The Canonicity of the Bible

An interesting article by Ernst von Dobschütz in the July number of the *American Journal of Theology* attempts to trace the process by which the idea of canonicity has been discredited. After reviewing some of the principal factors involved in the making of the Canon during the first four centuries, he shows that from the sixteenth century on several diverging lines of influence all tend toward the disestablishment of the old notion of the Canon. In the first place, the development of the Roman Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility gave the right of interpretation of the Canon exclusively to the ecclesiastical authority. Thus, while the Canon is retained, the notion of canonicity is weakened if not abandoned. The Pope has become the Canon. In the second place, the critical movement of Humanism tended to shake off the yoke of ecclesiastical authority and mediaeval tradition and go "back to the sources." The books of the Old and New Testament Canons were subjected to the strict rules of literary criticism, and graded according to their authority and importance as estimated by Fathers like Eusebius and Origen. This of course shakes the notion of canonicity at a vital point, by denying its unity and uniformity. Again, Luther's bold principle of judging every book according to its contents abandons the idea of canonicity far more effectually than Humanistic criticism. To Luther the authorship of the books is not the most important thing; if a book preaches Christ, it is apostolic, i.e., it has authority, which is only another way of saying it is divine or canonical. Under the influence of Rationalism, historical criticism and interpretation of the

nineteenth century have claimed the right to criticize freely all the books of the New Testament and judge them on the historical basis rather than on the basis of dogmatic authority. And so the old notion of canonicity has to be renounced; no word of the Bible has authority merely because it is found in the Bible. In spite of this, however, our longing for life, eternal life, personal life, is satisfied by the Bible as by nothing else. It is a book of faith and devotion. By reading it and praying, we will find life everlasting and moral strength. "We do not diminish the authority of the Bible by casting away the notion of canonicity: on the contrary we establish it at its proper place."

International Christianity—A Plea for Church Unity

That the final security of the world's peace shall be international Christianity is maintained by Dr. Newman Smyth in an article, "Christianity after the War," in the *Constructive Quarterly* for June, 1915. The writer points out that, though the United States is neutral in the great war, the American churches cannot remain unconcerned and indifferent. "There can be no question as to the need and opportunity for Christian mediation after the war. Surely the Christianity of this neutral country, in its citizenship related by ties of blood with all the peoples at war, and in its churches bound by common traditions and worshiping in many tongues with the various churches of the old world, may hold the position of a favored nation for free intercourse and fellowship with the educational and religious communities of these countries of Europe." In view of this opportunity, he pleads for greater church unity. The disorganization and consequent weakness of Protestant Christianity are deplored. To do its work in this coming era Christianity must become dynamically one. The churches must face squarely the existing

facts of the inefficiency through divisions of our Christianity, and at the same time, without giving way to pessimism, look up and have the vision of the power of Christ's Christianity. He believes that the churches could bring about unity if they would only accept the new commandment, "Love one another," and seriously face the problem. The work of the Federal Council of Churches is commended as a good beginning, and the proposed "World Conference" on questions of faith and order as a first step toward amity, unfortunately delayed by the war, may well be the place and the hour of reconciliation for religious leaders who shall be gathered in this neutral land for the supreme purpose of considering what the *practice* of Christianity shall require of the churches of every name throughout the world. In anticipation of this great gathering all the churches are urged to make every possible effort to combine the religious forces of our own country so that they may form one solid force to overcome in the future the anti-Christian powers which render wars inevitable.

The Church and the Workingman

"If the church will put less emphasis upon the desirable dollar and more upon the white hands and the clean soul, then the workingman will come to the church for the Christ in whom he believes," is the conclusion of Mr. R. A. Brown in an article on "The Church and the Workingman" in the May number of the *Methodist Review*. The church has no business to single out the workingman as an object for discussion and effort. After all, he is not a greater sinner in regard to church attendance than the banker, the golf player, the merchant automobile owner and his farmer joy-riding competitor, and a great army of tired office men and speculators in stocks or land or grain, who read their Sunday newspaper in their cozy homes and are not apparently in much, if any, closer sympathy with church

movements than the much-talked-of workingman. It is because working people have mistaken the attitude of the church, and do not believe that it is seeking the greatest good to the greatest number, that they are largely indifferent to church effort. They are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the betterment of laboring conditions and suspect that the church is not with them in their struggle. If the workingman is to come to church it will not be for charity, nor employment, nor amusement, nor education, but for religion. The church must put the emphasis where Christ placed it with Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." And it must further insist on the democracy of the church, the soul of a workingman or his child being counted as valuable as that of his millionaire employer. Then the workingman will come to church for his religion.

The Apocalypse of Peter

The story of the discovery of the Apocalypse of Peter, together with a critical study of its contents, is contributed to the *Church Quarterly Review* for April, 1915, by M. R. James, Litt.D., Provost of King's College, Cambridge.

The book was well known to ancient writers and seems to have narrowly escaped being included in the Canon. But only fragments of the contents have been known until recent times. In 1892 the contents of the Gizeh manuscript were published, containing portions of the Book of Enoch, of the

Gospel of Peter, and of the Apocalypse of Peter, all in Greek. Eighteen years later, M. l'Abbé Sylvain Gréban published in the *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* a translation of an Ethiopic Petro-Clementine book, the text of which was contained in a famous Ethiopic collection of D'Abbadie. This was none other than the long-lost book, almost in complete form. It purports to be a revelation given by Christ to the apostles, of whom Peter is the chief spokesman, and also the narrator of the revelation. Jesus is seated on the Mount of Olives and his disciples ask him what are to be the signs of his coming and of the end of the world. The answer of the Lord to the question of the apostles occupies the greater part of the book. The description of heaven and hell and of the last great judgment are very vivid. The hell is the hell of Dante, and the familiar belief that the world is to perish by fire when Christ comes to judge the quick and the dead, which receives canonical sanction in the second Epistle of Peter, is insisted on in the Apocalypse. Dr. James thinks that the currency of this idea among us may be ascribed in large part to the emphasis laid on the doctrine in this book. He also thinks that the Gospel of Peter was written later and got some of its material from the Apocalypse. It is probable that while the book had a tremendous influence on the popular imagination of the early church, the educated and more critical element early detected its superficiality and weakness.